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(U) USSR: NUANCES IN CHINA POLICY

Summary

The continuity of Soviet China policy through two recent successions points to a consensus concerning China among Soviet leaders, who would like to reduce tensions and improve relations to the extent possible without major concessions to Beijing. Soviet officials differ, however, on the prospects of Sino-Soviet relations and on such questions as whether Deng Xiaoping is moving China toward socialism or away from it.

As the current Sino-Soviet consultations proceed and trade and other contacts expand, these differences could translate into disputes about policy, especially about the wisdom of offering more significant concessions to China than those offered so far. One such potentially controversial move would be the withdrawal of some Soviet military units from Mongolia.

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Orthodoxy of the "Old China Hands"

China specialists in the CPSU Central Committee agencies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Institute of the Far East--the major specialized academic organization--have been described as the orthodox wing of Soviet China watchers. This group includes veterans of the Sino-Soviet split who have become bureaucratically cautious and who view China as intrinsically anti-Soviet. They typically refer to the Deng Xiaoping post-Mao reform program as "Maoism without Mao."

Some US observers have discerned within this group two subgroups: one of "pragmatists," principally in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the

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UNCLASSIFIED

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- 2 -

other of ultra-orthodox specialists principally in party organizations. The Foreign Ministry pragmatists include Deputy Foreign Ministers Mikhail Kapitsa and Leonid Ilichev, as well as China specialist Sergey Tikhvinskiy (now rector of the Diplomatic Academy), all of whom have played key roles in the Sino-Soviet consultations and tend to emphasize the progress made in the last two years in such practical areas as trade, technical assistance, and exchanges.

The subgroup of party specialists, on the other hand, tends to be more pessimistic. It includes such men as Oleg Rakhmanin, deputy chief of the department responsible for liaison with ruling communist parties, who has been a prolific writer about China under various pseudonyms (e.g., Pravda's "I. Aleksandrov"), and Ivan Kovalenko, a deputy chief of the party's International Department responsible for Japan who also has an interest in China. The subgroup of party specialists generally emphasizes that no basic improvement in relations with China is possible as long as Beijing persists in its "three demands": that Moscow withdraw its military presence from Afghanistan and Mongolia and the Vietnamese do the same in Kampuchea.^{1/}

The views of the two subgroups are variously reflected in policy statements. Gromyko's election address on February 27, 1984, for example, followed the cautiously optimistic Chinese Foreign Ministry line. The address cited progress in Sino-Soviet consultations with no mention of the "obstacles" raised by Beijing. Four days later Chernenko stressed that the USSR would not negotiate concerning the interests of third countries, a reference to Beijing's three demands that presumably reflected the position of the more conservative subgroup. In any case, the difference is one of nuance and timing, and both views are encompassed within Moscow's negotiating strategy.

Soviet military officials undoubtedly must be included among the most orthodox of the establishment China watchers, although their views are much less accessible to Western observers. The Soviet Armed Forces for more than a decade have been engaged in augmenting and modernizing border defenses near China--an operation which by now has acquired bureaucratic momentum and created vested interests that will be difficult to budge. Furthermore, the Soviet military is accustomed to working with worst-case scenarios: It will continue to regard China and China's potential allies, the US and Japan, as the putative enemy, regardless of diplomatic considerations.

^{1/} See also INR Report 750-AR, "Soviet Perceptions of Contemporary China," January 4, 1984, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE, Decontrol: 3/31/84.

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- 3 -

Impact of Less Orthodox Observers

The Soviet Union also has less orthodox China watchers, however, whose views may in fact become more significant as relations with Beijing develop. Some of these individuals are academicians, such as political scientist Fedor Burlatskiy, who are not primarily China specialists but have developed an interest in China for various reasons. Some are China scholars, such as L. P. Deliusin from the Institute of Oriental Studies, which generally specializes in more conventional Sinology and avoids contemporary China issues. The less orthodox commentators on China also include such figures as the popular and influential newspaper and television personality Aleksandr Bovin.

These observers have taken a particular interest in Deng Xiaoping's post-Mao reform program, perhaps in some cases because of the relevance of aspects of that program to the post-Stalin Soviet Union. The academicians in this group have long argued that Soviet Sinology itself needs reform, to get out of its ideological rut. The group tends to take a more optimistic view of China, interpreting Dengism as a return to socialism rather than a deviation and therefore arguing that China eventually will return to the Soviet model. Bovin has suggested in a television commentary that in the current Sino-Soviet consultations, even some of China's conditions--e.g., the question of military deployment near the border--might be negotiable if approached on a "reciprocal" basis.

All of the viewpoints described--except possibly that Deng's reforms might have applicability in the USSR--are part of Soviet establishment thinking. Among the China watchers mentioned, Burlatskiy has come the closest to stating that the problems of ineffectiveness and demoralization that Deng Xiaoping is addressing are actually generic to autocratic societies; but even Burlatskiy maintains a degree of ambiguity that prevents his writing from expressing overt dissidence. It thus has been possible for formulations developed by the less orthodox China watchers to be used by Soviet leaders, as Brezhnev did in Tashkent in 1979 when he offered an olive branch to Beijing in the form of calling China a "socialist" country. This has since become standard Soviet nomenclature, bringing to an end a period of several years during which China's "socialism" was debated by Soviet academics but avoided by Soviet leaders.

Degrees of Influence in Policy

The not-surprising fact that there are nuances in Soviet thinking about China does not affect present policy but may become more significant if the trend toward Sino-Soviet rapprochement continues. Eventually Moscow may work out a negotiating strategy that will try to accommodate Beijing's three "obstacles" without

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- 4 -

compromising overriding Soviet interests. In the same way, Beijing may accept interpretations that amount to less than its full bill of demands. Without some mutual accommodation, there can be only a very limited rapprochement. But at the time of accommodation, factionalism and policy differences could prove a seriously disruptive factor in Moscow as well as in Beijing.

It is conceivable that the Kremlin leadership at some point in the process of consultation with Beijing will consider a dramatic gesture designed to elicit or respond to a corresponding Chinese move. The Soviets could, for example, agree to move a division from Mongolia back to the USSR without significantly degrading Soviet border defenses. Remaining in Mongolia would be four divisions as well as Mongolian forces that have been modernized in recent years. Moreover, the division that would be withdrawn could be reintroduced into Mongolia at any time. In any case, Mongolia constitutes a significant buffer against Chinese attack; it is virtually the only border area where the Soviets could conduct a defense in depth. Kremlin consideration of a token withdrawal from Mongolia nonetheless could become very controversial.

Such action would be supported by the less orthodox China specialists who would see it as useful encouragement of China's post-Mao effort to strengthen socialism through reform. The proposal might also be supported by Foreign Ministry pragmatists as a constructive diplomatic move to encourage a meaningful response from Beijing. But the orthodox China specialists are likely to be bitterly opposed, arguing that such a gesture would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and likely would only encourage Beijing in its intrinsically anti-Soviet orientation. The most adamant opposition might come from the military with its predilection for worst-case scenarios. Clearly only a decisive Soviet leadership could push such a proposal through its own policymaking apparatus.

Soviet moves regarding the consultations with Beijing so far have been well within the scope of the consensus among various groups of China specialists, however, and seem not yet to have been controversial. Differences in formulations, expressions of optimism or pessimism by various officials, and varying degrees of observance of the moratorium on polemics still reflect tactical moves rather than factionalism. But the potential for controversy well may be one of the ingredients that have kept the Soviet stance toward China relatively static, changing even less over time than the Chinese position toward the USSR.

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